

NACSA Conference “Creating Futures So Bright” October 20-23, 2014

Ignite Your Inner Leader-Plenary

Multiple speakers gave quick snapshots of what it was to be a leader in the world of charter school authorizing- produce high quality charter schools making better lives for children; have endurance; an Army theme one said it takes basic training, setting targets, be the best leader, plan, protect and have a moral compass, bring your friends, align politicians; another said if you can write it or draw it on a small space you know what you are doing, a 17 year old student said to have vision, leadership and autonomy.

Academic Accountability Measurers

Presenters in this session described components like those in Maine’s performance framework- student proficiency, growth, subgroup gap closure, college/career readiness, state and federal accountability. To be bargained were mission specific items for outcomes, performance cycle established, threshold for intervention and closure if necessary.

Federal and state grading or rating system, AYP, state designations, and annual measureable objectives used in various states.

How well public charter schools are doing is also measured by comparing student proficiency with students at the resident or assigned school. For example a charter school with students from 4 schools with 50%, 62%, 40% and 53 % proficiency would be weighted by what percent of the charter’s students came from that area 62% at 10% of students

Measuring student progress or growth over time through criterion reference measures, norm or subgroup growth can be analyzed to see if the growth is enough to get to certain criteria.

Mission specific goals must be quantifiable, data must be available, and mission specific goals shouldn’t trump common measures of academic performance. Example is Illinois-where each school has 2 school specific goals, they are self-reported (not certified) and are updated on an annual basis.

“But they changed the test!” Must accountability take a break due to Common Core Assessments?

States discussed transitions and legislation to guide the process. Florida: Senate bill 1642 Summer 2014 current system, Fall 2015 baseline School grade based on new ; summer of 2016 school grade with consequences. School grades based on achievement, learning gains, learning gains of lowest 25%.

Ohio: Legislature passed bills on safe harbor starting in 2012-13, no letter grade for 2014-15, charter schools automatic closure still applies.

DC: multiple school leaders met , developed hold harmless policy, performance more than proficiency, story more than score, wont trigger site review, wont publically label schools, hold continue help sessions for school leaders

Advise using multiple measures i.e. state, NWEA, in house-portfolios, observations, performance

Promoting Performance: Strategies for Developing Annual Performance Reports

Found this session very helpful at this point in time for MCSC. Presenters showed various ways of reporting out both academic and financial information. Reports are placed on web and are gone over with each of the charter school boards. Reports are based on the performance contracts.

Governance operations effectiveness is looked at with the lens of how many board meetings are held, what is the % of board members attendance, how many vacancies go unfilled.

Financial information includes the audit, borrowings, analysis of short and long term financial information, institution expenditures by category.

It is useful to decide the use of the report and the audience, in Maine reports go to charter schools and the Education Commissioner could they also be used as a broader education tool, for parents/guardians, press releases, assist in decision making for legislation, boards, MCSC. Do the reports become part of an ongoing conversation? Reports can be leveraged for accountability, capacity building, and body of evidence.

Once we create a template for data and other information will software propagate info in such as excel or ndesign?

Taming the Gorilla in the Room: Full-time Cyber Schools and the Agenda for Quality Charter Schools

Looking across the country" performance of virtual schools is not as good as we want it to be". Both the presentation panel and audience participants had many concerns regarding virtual charters. Maine with its separate application and specific criteria seems to be ahead of some states in establishing standards of acceptable practice. Unique requirements for the application and contract are a good option.

Types of students making a good fit include those who are motivated; read and write well, independent, curious, good comprehension skills and those who have strong learning coaches.

Virtual schools offer a place for kids who are bullied, have health issues, kids who have a high level engagement in sports or the arts and need a flexible schedule. There seems to be a

mismatch with those who are attracted such as students who are more behind, struggling learners who do not succeed as well.

States of Arizona, Colorado and Pennsylvania are undergoing major quality challenges. In Ohio 3 of the 23 virtual schools are achieving at the same or better than bricks and mortar but the vast majority are in the bottom quartile. Across the country virtual providers are unwilling to provide student data (including K12). If the data is good why not share it?

Scale may play a part in the success rates as largest schools are 3-5,000 students. Impacted by high mobility rates performance calculations are difficult. External providers must be held accountable for these charter schools. Another issue for consideration is actual cost per student of the virtual school. Illinois put in a bid price.

Ideas-can students be given a 6-8 week trial period; can schools hold to a trade policy which says that school's pay is based on course completion not attendance.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Fulfilling the Charter Bargain Through Charter Renewal

Presenters advised: Approve only strong, demonstrably, viable applicant, renew only if meet or exceed performance expectation. Does the governing board fully know the application for renewal? Ground the renewal in the contract and the monitoring process and annual reports. Decide the renewal based on the body of evidence, school response and site visit, recommendation, public hearing and then decide. States are conducting visits two times a year, one in the Fall for compliance and the second in the Spring for a review of academic performance, the four areas of academics, governance, operations and finance.

Denver, Colorado attends board meetings and conducts classroom visits. They differentiate their renewals to low performing-nonrenewal; uneven performance-short term (2-3 year) with performance conditions; strong but limited data and leading indicators-midlength (3-4) renewal; consistent and persistent record-5 year contract.

The Mayor's office in Indianapolis has clear measures on a dashboard with the fourth year fact finding. In the renewal application only areas of concern where not meeting standards needs to be addressed. Word of caution was why hire someone with a lousy track record but a stellar interview with promises of what he future will be. A rigorous internal debate is conducted as part of the review process.

Appeal process? Indiana the law gives authorizer authority; Colorado and Florida follow the state process.

Managing the Decision Makers: Building a Strong Relationship with Your Board

Presentation-Annual goals and objectives are set for the Executive Director, Board approves. June sign off on targets. Program oversight and financial outcomes noted. Four goal buckets are

quality, quantity, success and legislation. As part of the evaluation school leaders give feedback- how is communication, is there a process for feedback, are there regular check-ins and what is the quality of the check-ins. Is there balanced communication between the commission and staff?

Capacity Interviews: Assessing the Talent of Applicant Teams

Presenter advice-do your due diligence. Check backgrounds, websites, FBI, Dunn and Bradstreet, Court records, Google, Facebook, Audits, Federal Tax Guidestar.org, track records, online charter websites, ask other states, current capacity, financial model, organizational viability. Ask tough questions, give applicant opportunity to address your concerns, and don't indicate by words or body language approval or disapproval.

Protecting the Public Interest: A Focus on Financial Accountability

Charter authorizers hold the public interest and student interest. Check for conflict of interest, look hard at the agreement with a management company, check for debt load, check leases for appropriate market value, independent board training to ensure knowledge of roles, funds needs to be transparent.

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